



GENDER TRAINERS AND COVID-19

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED FROM THE PANDEMIC?

VIRTUAL DIALOGUE REPORT 2021

OVERVIEW

The 17th Virtual Dialogue hosted by the UN Women Training Centre’s Community of Practice (CoP) explored how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected gender trainers, how they have navigated the crisis, and how we can put this learning into practice to strengthen training for gender equality.

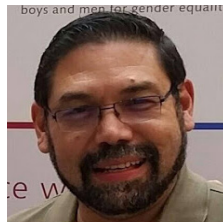
How has COVID-19 affected gender trainers? What have they learned and what do they recommend for the future of training for gender equality? This bilingual Virtual Dialogue from 18–28 February 2021 (in English and Spanish) was a space for participatory debate on gender trainers’ experiences, challenges and recommendations for transformative training for gender equality, nearly one year into the COVID-19 pandemic.



WEBINAR PANELLISTS



DR LUCY FERGUSON
(Moderator)



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DR DANIELA MORENO ALARCON

WHAT ARE VIRTUAL DIALOGUES?

Virtual Dialogues are online discussions on topics related to training for gender equality that form part of the UN Women Training Centre’s [Community of Practice \(CoP\)](#). They are mechanisms for training practitioners to continually discuss, exchange, and share knowledge and nurture a community for collective learning across the world. These inclusive dialogues ultimately aim to improve the quality and impact of training for gender equality worldwide. At the UN Women Training Centre, we believe in creating knowledge and sharing learning in a participatory manner. This is the drive behind our Virtual Dialogues.

The success of this Virtual Dialogue is thanks to our participants’ dedicated engagement. This report is based on the contributions of our expert Webinar panellists, our Webinar audience and forum participants. The Webinar was moderated by Dr Lucy Ferguson, UN Women Training Centre Consultant, and introduced by Ruya Leghari, Community of Practice Consultant, who wrote this report.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

HOW

HOW HAS THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AFFECTED GENDER TRAINERS AND TRAINING FOR GENDER EQUALITY?

What impact has the pandemic had on the volume and content of training?

In what ways has COVID-19 changed the way gender trainers work? How has it affected their methodological and pedagogical approaches?

What challenges have gender trainers faced during the pandemic? How have they navigated challenges and resistances?

WHAT

WHAT LESSONS HAVE GENDER TRAINERS LEARNED FROM THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC?

What kinds of training for gender equality – and on what issues – are increasingly needed and in demand?

What have we learned about effectively delivering training for gender equality during crises from this pandemic?

WHAT

How has the pandemic changed the field of training for gender equality?

WHAT RECOMMENDATIONS DO GENDER TRAINERS HAVE FOR THE FUTURE?

How can we strengthen our methodologies to continue evoking transformative change towards gender equality during and after the pandemic?

What needs to change – during and post-COVID-19 – in how we share knowledge, address resistances and advance experiential adult learning through training for gender equality?

KEY FINDINGS

COVID-19 pandemic is a public health crisis, a socio-economic crisis and a learning crisis. Around the globe, it has shaken education and training opportunities to their core: social distancing, travel restrictions and lockdown measures are affecting delivery, economic downturns are restricting budgets, and skills requirements are shifting drastically while curricula and methodologies struggle to catch up.

COVID-19 AND GENDER (IN)EQUALITY

COVID-19 is threatening to derail gender equality gains. The pandemic and its socio-economic fallout have gendered impacts. It is vital that gender trainers understand these impacts and work to address them through training for gender equality.

There has been a rise in school dropout rates for women and girls, especially in developing countries. The pandemic has dealt a particular blow to women-led small and medium-sized enterprises. Certain groups of women – such as migrant women, women with disabilities and transgender women – are particularly vulnerable in the wake of COVID-19.

Women’s and girls’ care burden has disproportionately increased. There has been some prospect of rebalancing gender roles in terms of home care, indicating potential positive repercussions. Men who have to spend more time at home with their families and are beginning to see practically what women have to go through, in addition to their work outside the home.

Yet the pandemic’s effects are also exacerbating tensions that feed into violence against women and girls. Risks of gender-based violence, and intimate partner violence in particular, have shot up. So too has the risk of harmful practices, such as female genital mutilation and child marriage. Cyber harassment and sexual harassment are evolving areas that we need to keep in mind.

“When the pandemic started, the gender research agenda was flipped on its head. All of our planning, all of our content as trainers, had to change completely from one day to the next. This was a real challenge: readapting our gender training curricula so quickly.”

– Dr Daniela Moreno Alarcon
Webinar panellist

“With the COVID 19 pandemic, the crises men experience have worsened due to economic insecurity, uncertainty, anxiety, unemployment or prolonged periods of staying at home. Incidents of violence against women, boys and girls have increased.”

– Alvaro Campos Guadamuz,
Webinar panellist

As workplace boundaries shift with the pandemic, sexual harassment is increasingly happening online. Many organizations that focus on addressing gender-based violence have put this issue ‘on the back burner’ given the COVID crisis. Just when support is most needed, it is hardest to find.

The COVID-19 pandemic is playing out at the same time as other reckonings around the world, such as the global climate crisis and the Black Lives Matter movement. The movement is radically changing thinking around gender justice – affirming the conviction that there can be no gender justice without racial justice. Mobilization to combat the climate emergency is making the links between gender and climate justice ever more clear. These issues are increasingly important as training for gender equality strives to address intersectionality and environmental sustainability.

COVID-19 AND GENDER TRAINERS

Gender trainers are facing new challenges in the wake of COVID-19. Training delivery has been transformed. Trainers and participants alike cannot travel to in-person trainings. People are often in very difficult situations when they are delivering or attending training courses. It is not yet clear what impact the pandemic will have on training budgets. It is likely to be harder to justify large budgets for face-to-face training as online training gains pace. Institutions may argue that training can be safely and effectively delivered online. While this is true, it is important to acknowledge the challenges and limitations of online learning.

The pandemic has caused a shift in the theory of change of training for gender equality. It is proving challenging to use feminist dialectics or employ feminist pedagogies in remote training. Reflective and transformative thinking, addressing resistances, exploring participants’ identities and strengthening participants’ ability to learn from each other are difficult in online settings. Above all, it is challenging to employ experiential and participatory methodologies in remote learning.

“This has been a really challenging year for us as gender trainers. Training delivery has been completely transformed. Trainers have had to adapt their skills very rapidly, but without the necessary time to reflect on what this means for pedagogy. Learning objectives, tools and methods have not always changed.”

– Dr Lucy Ferguson, Webinar moderator

Virtual training is very different from face-to-face training. Participants learn differently and process information differently online. Communication and trust building are harder online. New partnerships and new information are more difficult to absorb. Trainees feel more ‘on guard’ and more isolated. This means that it is harder for participants to feel connected, both to each other and to gender trainers, and harder for participants to trust trainers. These issues must be considered in our approach to change management in training for gender equality.

Online training also has to be delivered differently. The composition of work teams has changed during COVID-19. Planning online training often offers less room for improvisation. Many gender trainers have not been trained in the effective use of information and communication technology (ICT). Overcoming gender trainers’ resistances to using ICT is another challenge that must be bridged. Trainers will have to learn how to engage differently online, expressing themselves differently and adapting facilitation to the ‘new normal’.

Cross-cultural communication for trainers working with global teams has become even more important as they engage with people from around the world, in different time zones, of different genders, and from different environments and cultures.

Learning how to intentionally and sensitively communicate online has become essential, particularly on sensitive topics like gender-based violence and abuse.

Despite the challenges, gender trainers have worked hard to turn adversity into opportunity. Online learning is no longer an option – it is a necessity. Recognizing this, trainers around the world did not stop delivering training for gender equality during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Instead, they are increasingly using digital tools to advance learning and dialogue. For example, the Men Engage Alliance organized the third Global Symposium on Masculinities entirely online in November 2020. Using various virtual modalities proved a resounding success, eliciting high levels of participation. Online training has several advantages that trainers are using to great effect, whether by recording sessions and making them available for global users online, or giving participants the flexibility to learn at their own pace.

Adjusting to the reality of the pandemic also means reassessing many aspects of training. For instance, the pandemic may give new impetus to the drive to hire local trainers and facilitators, rather than relying solely on trainers from the ‘Global North’.

EMERGING TRAINING TOPICS

The COVID-19 pandemic is not only affecting *how* training is delivered, it is increasingly changing *what* training is in demand. The pandemic has changed the gender research agenda. The increasing need for cross-cultural communication is driving up demand for training on such communication, including among gender trainers. There is growing demand for training on virtual facilitation skills among leaders, managers and trainers.

As rates of gender-based violence and domestic violence soar, calls for training on preventing and combatting violence is poised to increase. With more people working from home, employer and organizational level obligations vis-à-vis violence is a major emerging topic.

“We have learned that through online platforms, educational and training processes can be achieved. It is possible to work on changing personal attitudes and even therapy processes with men. Campaigns can be carried out. The number of activities and methodological modalities have multiplied. Significant user participation can be achieved.”

– Alvaro Campos Guadamuz,
Webinar panellist

“We need to pay attention to incentives for training. In poorer communities, for example, providing transportation and food for an event would be an incentive. How do we have those kinds of incentives in online scenarios? Maybe there are some advantages of the ‘new normal’ because we have had to adjust our budgets and our possibilities. Perhaps we are hiring more local trainers and local consultants than sending someone from the other side of the world.”

– Dr Daniela Moreno Alarcon,
Webinar panellist

Demand is growing for the integration of workplace safety, sexual harassment and cyber harassment issues into training for gender equality. Calls for training on other topics is also surging. These include psychological health, burnout among women taking on greater burdens of care work, women and the environment. With the Black Lives Matter movement, there is a growing focus on the need for training on intersectional discrimination against minority groups face – especially black women, indigenous women, women with disabilities and transgender women, among many others.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GENDER TRAINERS

Gender trainers need to **engage with the broader context** of the COVID-19 pandemic. Training curricula, facilitation strategies and learning objectives must address the pandemic's gendered effects and their links to intersectional inequalities. For instance, emerging topics needs to be factored into training for gender equality – such as surging rates of gender-based violence and child abuse.

It is also essential to continue to **employ the strategy of online training for gender equality** post- COVID. pandemic. Online training courses need to be specially designed, bearing in mind what can be done well – and what cannot – in online settings. Rather than simply transferring face-to-face materials online, trainers must develop new materials tailor-made for online settings. These must remain true to feminist pedagogies and a critical gender perspective. Acknowledging the limitations of remote learning is also important, such as the difficulty of guaranteeing confidentiality or anonymity in virtual training courses. If online training is to be effective, internet access must be improved, especially in developing countries and among marginalized groups worldwide.

“Grace Lee Boggs, American author and feminist philosopher, said ‘Transform yourself to transform the world.’ That is more important than ever in the work that we do now.”

– Adriana Greenblatt, Webinar panellist

Gender trainers must focus on **engagement and partnerships** to drive forward gender-responsive policies, programmes and gender mainstreaming during and post-COVID-19.

“The pandemic has taught us how significant our collective efforts as gender trainers can be towards achieving gender equality. What one thing we can do to ensure that we adapt to the changing situation? We need more action and sustained action.”

– Nnamdi Esemé, Webinar panellist

For instance, gender trainers should work with the media to intentionally script key messages highlighting the gender impacts of the pandemic. With misinformation spreading rapidly around the world, there is a clear need to train the media on gender equality. For public dissemination, we must be careful to validate information based on evidence and practice.

It is important that gender trainers do not work in silos; instead, we must try to forge partnerships across the board. It is important to engage with other civil society organizations and non-state actors, particularly in countries that have experienced an upsurge in gendered violence and marginalization in the wake of the pandemic.

While partnerships are needed across sectors, it is equally necessary for **gender trainers to support one another**. By networking and coming together as a community, trainers can support each other to continue their work, fine-tune their approaches and navigate challenges. There is a need to train gender trainers on using ICT, designing digital training courses, honing their online facilitation skills and addressing resistances in remote learning settings. Trainers should develop evaluations (online gender assessments) to identify good practices and factors that hamper virtual training for gender equality. Ideally, these assessments should be shared to enhance gender trainers' collective knowledge.

“The face-to-face modality is important, but it is not the only way to achieve effective training. HOWEVER, trainers need to be trained in the use of ICT [and] users require an adequate internet connection.”

– Alvaro Campos Guadamuz,
Webinar panellist

“Trainers are not outside of the pandemic. I would encourage us, as we to continue to fight for our cause, to also think about how we can support each other in the ways that we need psychologically and emotionally to be able to continue to do this work. Let’s look after each other. That way, we will be stronger to fight the fight together.”

– Dr Lucy Ferguson,
Webinar moderator

“The truth is, as facilitators, we also have Zoom fatigue. We have to do a lot of work when it comes to maintaining the concentration of your trainees. Make your presentations short, engaging and visually aesthetic. Speak slower.”

– Nnamdi Esemé,
Webinar panellist

FACILITATION STRATEGIES AND TIPS

In the wake of COVID-19 pandemic, several pragmatic strategies can support gender trainers to deliver more effective training for gender equality, including online training.

Different voices can be ‘talked over’ when people communicate online. As a facilitator, it is important to keep in mind who is in a session and what their needs are. **Checking in beforehand** to get to know participants, for example with a survey, helps trainers to tailor training sessions to participants’ needs.

Inclusive engagement manifests differently across cultures, genders and time zones online. This is why **engaging intentionally** is so important in online training.

‘**Group agreements**’ are especially key – that is, to intentionally build agreements of how a training group can create a safe learning environment online. Creating communication guidelines with participants helps them feel more comfortable, while enabling them to collectively decide how to show who needs a break, and when, and how to show who wants to speak, and when.

During trainings, facilitators should **‘check in’** at least twice. For instance, trainers can check to see if participants understand the content by using a simple ‘thumbs up’ or ‘thumbs down’ emoji. This helps to take a ‘temperature reading’ of the session to determine whether participants are engaged, whether they need a break, or whether they want to ask questions.

For issues such as intersectionality, it is valuable to explore different aspects of participants' identity through **icebreakers**. In online settings, icebreakers are especially important. For instance, a trainer can encourage participants to introduce themselves with an adjective that describes them and starts with the first letter of their first name. Use **chat** functions on online platforms help to foster connections and build trust. **Breakout rooms** are useful to create a safe space for small numbers of participants to connect on a deeper level. **Discussion boards** can be constructive platforms for dialogue, both between participants and between them and trainers. Identifying an online 'meeting point' makes it easier for participants to engage in debate and teamwork.

Clarity is absolutely essential online. Gender trainers need to prioritize clear, intentional, short and directive communication in online training. For example, in breakout rooms or during role plays in online training, participants usually need more clarity and the repetition of instructions. Trainers should remember to 'go slow' – i.e. to speak slower and not to overload the participants.

Thinking about **different ways to convey information** is important. Sending participants information beforehand – such as a high level overview of a training session – is especially useful since different people process information differently. Recording sessions and sending these to participants reinforces key messages and enables trainees to learn at their own pace. Case studies are useful for explaining concepts, their application in practice and examining what 'lies beneath' these concepts.

While content in training for gender equality tends to be verbal or written, trainers need to remember that this is not everyone's way of processing information. Some creative strategies include using **visuals, music or drawing** to engage participants. These access different cognitive parts of the brain and enable trainees to absorb information in a different way, often in a short amount of time.

Gender trainers can also experiment with **movement and embodiment practices**. However, they should bear in mind that participants may have different mobility issues that must be considered to devise learning strategies which work for everyone in a training session.

TIPS FOR OVERCOMING 'ZOOM FATIGUE'

- Name the fatigue, i.e. have spaces for people to say that they need more than one break
- Integrate break times more intentionally throughout presentations
- Ensure that presentations are clear and concise
- Build a culture of respect in workshops
- Make sure that people are comfortable with different kinds of activities
- Be more creative and versatile with the formats used in training (e.g. audiovisual, etc.)
- Use different modalities that raise the spirits and engage a different side of the brain
- Engage participants on a human level
- Create some kind of movement in the training
- Integrate more online cultural communication strategies (e.g. non-verbal communication and assertive, respectful communication guidelines)
- Integrate an intersectional gender perspective

CREATIVE ONLINE TRAINING TOOLS

The COVID-19 pandemic has witnessed the proliferation of online platforms used for learning, webinars, roundtables, teamwork or even counselling sessions – from platforms like Zoom to Microsoft Teams and Facebook Live. Many people around the world have a ‘love-hate’ relationship with these platforms nearly one year into the pandemic.

Gender trainers are increasingly using collaboration software, such as Google Docs, MIRO and Padlet. MIRO is a useful tool for strategic planning sessions in training for gender equality. There are different templates that trainers use, as well as features like ‘post-its’ to group together different themes.

Teachable is one of many online teaching platforms. It is especially useful for training for gender equality as it helps trainers to structure an online training, which includes certification at the end.

“As a trainer the most important thing for me is the learning engagement and the learning objectives. I don’t just add fancy tools which many people make the mistake of doing. It’s really about what tool would best help further the learning objectives, given the time you’ve got online.”

– Adriana Greenblatt,
Webinar panellist

Trainers are also relying more on designing infographics and videos to share with participants or on social networks. To keep participation straightforward, it is advisable not to use complex applications unless learners are familiar with them, or unless trainers can guide them through these apps. Most importantly, it is important to select tools that fit your learning objectives, and not vice versa.

WATCH THE WEBINAR

[Virtual Dialogue on gender trainers and COVID-19: What have we learned from the pandemic?](#)



WEBINAR PANNELLISTS (18 FEBRUARY 2021)



Dr Lucy Ferguson (moderator)

Lucy is a specialist in gender equality and women's empowerment. A consultant for the UN Women Training Centre, she has written extensively on using feminist pedagogical principles and working towards training that is reflexive, focused on process and grounded in the transformative potential of participatory training encounters. She has worked with several international organizations, including UN Volunteers, the Commonwealth Secretariat, UNDP and UNWTO. Her latest book is *Gender Training: a Transformative Tool for Gender Equality*.



Álvaro Campos Guadamuz

Álvaro is the president and legal representative of Instituto WEM, the Costa Rican Institute of Masculinity, Couple and Sexuality. He leads and coordinates Latin America's regional Men Engage network and has been heavily involved in working with men and boys during the COVID-19 pandemic to address domestic violence, intimate partner violence and sexuality. Instituto WEM, is a non-profit association at the forefront of working on gender equality issues with men and boys in Central America. Its purpose is to contribute to research, reflection, training and interventions on issues related to masculinities and sexualities.



Nnamdi Esemé

Nnamdi is an academic, gender expert, writer, facilitator and a global voice in engaging men and boys to advance gender equality. His policy-targeted advocacy in Sierra Leone contributed to regional efforts that resulted in an ECOWAS Court ruling obliging the Government to reverse its policy prohibiting pregnant girls from attending school. His most recent efforts focus on addressing intimate partner violence among migrant women in Europe, and studying the epidemiology behind gender in primary and transmural care. He supports social start-ups and youth-led feminist movements in Africa through transformative education. He has served in leadership positions with organizations such as Baze University, EducAid, the Geneva Center for Security Sector Governance, UNFPA, UNITAR, HIV/AIDS Alliance, UNFPA, FP2020, among others. He is currently completing a Master's degree in epidemiology at Radboud University, the Netherlands.



Adriana Greenblatt

Adriana brings 15+ years of diverse experience as a workplace human rights and employment lawyer, trainer and facilitator in gender, diversity and inclusion, leadership and organizational well-being. She has worked with the United Nations, universities as well as the non-profit and private sector. She supports organizations to create equitable, inclusive environments and relations through training, policy development, coaching and communications. Her recent work includes training to empower senior women leaders in a prominent microfinance company, working with STEM companies on inclusive work environments, partnering with the McGill University Desautels Faculty of Management to train emerging leaders on building cultures of respect and contributing to the Global Compact Network of Canada's Blueprint for Gender Equality in the Private Sector.



Dr Daniela Moreno Alarcon

Daniela is a Chilean/Spanish researcher, trainer and consultant in the field of gender mainstreaming in sustainable development. Over the past 11 years, she has honed her professional experience in Latin America and the Caribbean, with a particular focus on gender mainstreaming in tourism development in a wide range of countries – among the sectors most impacted by COVID-19. She has collaborated with organizations such as UN Women, the UN World Tourism Organization, ITC-ILO, Serviço Social do Comércio, ECLAC and the International and Ibero-American Foundation for Administration and Public Policies.

UN WOMEN IS THE UN ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN. A GLOBAL CHAMPION FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS, UN WOMEN WAS ESTABLISHED TO ACCELERATE PROGRESS ON MEETING THEIR NEEDS WORLDWIDE.

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.